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ABSTRACT

This practicum took place at a spouse abuse shelter located in a county classified as urban in the southeast United States. It was found that once a family left the shelter, support groups were not available to help the children with feelings related to living in a home where domestic violence has occurred. Most of these children were already exhibiting characteristics that demonstrated their potential of following the inter-generational cycle and becoming abusers or victims of abuse as adults. A 10-week outreach group was designed for children who were living away from the domestic violence situation. The group met at the same time as a therapy group for the mothers who were abused. The group addressed issues such as feelings, self-esteem, stress, stereotypes, and non-violent conflict resolution. Topics were chosen to provide children with the skills necessary to break the intergenerational cycle. Although most of the children attended only one-half of the group sessions, mothers stated that they saw improvements not only in their children's behavior, but also in their self-esteem and ability to solve problems. Another important consideration of the success of the children's group was that the mothers were also attending a therapy group. Mothers were able to deal with their own issues and become more aware of the dynamics of spouse abuse and how it affects their children. Through parental awareness and children's support groups, children can acquire the skills necessary to avoid abusive relationships. (Author/ABL)

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Development of an Outreach Group for Children Ages Five through Thirteen Who Have Witnessed Domestic Violence

by
Corinne Baker
Cohort 36

A Practicum Report Presented to the National Master's Program for Child Care Administrators in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Master of Science

NOVA UNIVERSITY
1990

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ABSTRACT

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Once a family leaves shelter, support groups were not available to help children deal with the feelings related to living in a home where domestic violence occurred. Most of these children were already exhibiting characteristics that demonstrated their potential of following the inter generational Cycle and becoming abusers or abused as adults.

The author designed a ten week outreach group for children who are now living away from the domestic violent situation. The group met at the same time as a therapy group for the mothers who were abused. The group addressed issues such as: feelings, self esteem, stress, stereotypes and non-violent conflict resolution. Topics were chosen to provide children with the skills necessary to break the intergenerational Cycle.

Parents indicated an improvement in the behaviors of their children and in their own awareness of how domestic violence affects their children. The children demonstrated an increased knowledge of the group topics and their ability to apply the topics to real life situations by incorporating the issues into a final puppet show. The children's outreach group will continue to be implemented by the spouse abuse shelter.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Community Setting

The setting for this practicum is in the southeast United States. The agency is located in a county classified as urban. The population residing in this community have a wide range of socio economic and educational backgrounds.

Work Setting

This practicum takes place at a spouse abuse shelter. The shelter is a residential facility for women and their dependent children who are leaving a domestic violent situation. Shelter services are available on a twenty four hour basis and residents may stay for up to three weeks, with the average stay being ten days. The shelter has a self help philosophy, with counselors on staff to offer alternatives, education and support, while encouraging residents to make choices and decisions. The shelter developed a therapeutic Children's Program three years ago. Infants through adolescents who are residents can participate in daily activities including art, play, tutoring, individual and group counseling. School age children are required to attend school within three days of entering shelter. Parenting and support groups are offered for these women. Services have recently been expanded to include an outreach program so services can be offered for abused women who might not need shelter and

those that have recently left shelter and are living independently.

Writer's Role

The writer is the Children's Program Coordinator for the shelter. As Coordinator, the writer was responsible for designing and developing the therapeutic program. Prior to this job, the writer designed and coordinated a similar children's program at another spouse abuse shelter in the same county. The writer supervises one employee and several volunteers who assist with daily programs. It is the responsibility of the Coordinator to work closely with parents and the other counselors to develop a family approach to meet each child's individual needs.

Chapter 2

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Definition

Children who have witnessed abuse between their parents begin at a young age to exhibit characteristics similar to those of adults who abuse or are abused. Those children are predisposed to follow the Intergenerational Cycle and become abusers or abused as adults. Intervention is needed to teach children prevention skills to stop this Cycle from continuing. Currently, most shelters that offer children's programs only work with children on a short term basis while they are residents. Longer term groups must be made available for children after they leave shelter.

Evidence

In a questionnaire given to mothers attending the shelter's support group, 85% of the mothers stated that they had witnessed parental abuse as a child. These mothers had all become involved in abusive relationships as adults, although most had left their abuser within the last year. Listed on the questionnaire were characteristics similar to those of adults who abuse or are abused. The mothers indicated that their children, one year or older, were exhibiting an average of six of these characteristics. (Appendix A: 18)

Gruszinski (1988) found the research to indicate that children who observe violence between their parents are severely affected. Many of these children are physically, sexually or emotionally abused themselves. The children's observation of parental violence led to problems including "somatic behavior problems, being put at risk for abuse and neglect and a child's learning of violence through modeling."

Analysis of the Cause

Bandura's social learning theory concludes that "exposure to aggressive models increase aggressive behavior both verbally and physically " (Johnson, 1972). Children who witness domestic violence in their homes often do not have healthy role models. They see violence used as a means to release anger and a way to solve conflicts. Violence is a learned behavior and children learn early whether this method is acceptable in their families.

Stereotyped male/female roles are also learned at an early age. The abuser, usually the father, is controlling, dominating and violent. The mother is submissive, isolated and a caretaker. Shupe (1987) stated that the cultural level of sexism "reinforces the violent actions by making men's dominance a virtue rather than a character flaw." Many men do not see anything wrong with their violence and pass that attitude on to their children. Sexism becomes a means to rationalize the use of violence by men towards women.

Relationship to the Literature

Layzer, Goodman, and Delange (1986) stated that "shelter staff are wasting their efforts if they do not attempt to follow up and support families after they leave shelter." These families need ongoing support to keep the home environment non-violent for their children. Although many shelters have developed follow up programs and groups for abused women, few have begun such programs for the children.

Roy (1988) indicates that in order to reduce the impact of wife battering on children, shelters must "develop strategies for providing extended and adjunct care to families in need." She suggests developing programs for teenagers that deal with counseling issues such as stereotypes, stress reduction, anger mamagement, feelings, responsibility and consequences of violent behavior.

Aiken (1981) stated that in order to break the cycle of violence we must recognize the child as a victim and recognize that to intervene is to prevent. In designing programs for children we must plant seeds of self esteem, choice and non-violent options (Aikens, 1987). We must devote the quality of commitment to children that we have committed to battered women.

The Florida Network of Victim Witness Services, Inc. (1987) listed several strategies for working with children in crisis. they stated the importance of children talking about and ventilating feelings related to the crisis. The Network

stated that parents should be prepared for regressive behaviors and expressions of anger and aggression soon after a crisis. Children need help discussing feelings related to a family crisis such as violence between parents. Groups can offer support and education about these issues.

Chapter 3

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal

The goal of this practicum was to implement an outreach group for children who have previously resided in a domestic violent situation.

Objectives

The objectives of this practicum were:

1. After ten weeks, the children will improve their inappropriate behavior by 50 percent as rated by their parent on a pretest and a positest.
2. After ten weeks, each child will be able to state a non violent solution to a problem situation on a self evaluation form.
3. After ten weeks, the children will be able to state three positive affirmations about themselves on a self-evaluation form.
4. After ten weeks, the children will be able to identify and give examples of three feelings on on a self evaluation form.

3. After ten weeks, 80 percent of the children will be able to give an example of a stereotype and rephrase it into a true statement on a self evaluation form.

Evaluation

The objectives were evaluated by comparing the ratings on a list of behaviors that was given to the parents to fill out. This form, used as a pretest and posttest, contained a list of behaviors similar to those of adults who abuse or are abused (Appendix B: 20). Another tool used to evaluate these objectives was a self-evaluation form filled out by each child during the first and last group session (Appendix C: 22). Children unable to read were given the test orally. A parent evaluation form was utilized to receive overall feedback and suggestions for future groups (Appendix D: 24).

Chapter 4

SOLUTION STRATEGIES

Information Collection

Literature on Domestic Violence focused on battered women and the men who abused them. Only in recent literature, has the attention begun to shift to the forgotten victims, children. Articles written on children's programs in shelters state they are too new to determine the long term effect on children. Research indicated that more intervention programs for children are needed to break the Intergenerational Cycle.

Solution Strategies

Gruszinski (1988) discussed the need for educational support groups for children of battered women. Children who participated in their six week group were able to acknowledge that the violence in their home was not their fault, learned ways to protect themselves, learned non violent methods for solving problems and increased their self esteem. The writer developed a ten week outreach group for children who were living separately from their abusive parent and whose mothers were attending the women's group. The children's group taught skills that could prevent abusive tendencies as they grow into adults.

Implementation Plan

The ten week children's outreach group was held one evening per week at the same time as the mother's group.

To be eligible for the group, mothers and children had to be living independently from the abusive parent. Mothers must have met the outreach counselor individually or in other groups to establish a basic understanding of domestic violence and its effects on chidlren. Families had to commit to attending the full ten week session. Children between the ages of five and thirteen were divided into two age appropriate groups determined by the numbers of each age level. Each group lasted between thirty minutes and one hour. Each group was limited to eight children. Children not in group participated in activities with volunteers. Communication with parents was accomplished through a weekly newsletter. The parents were encouraged to discuss each week's topics and were given suggestions of ways to implement these ideas at home (Appendix E: 26).

When working with children, their individual needs must be considered. In the following calendar plan, the topics related to the goals of the group. However, the group leader was flexible enough to adjust the activities to meet the needs and interests of the children in each group.

Calendar Plan

Week 1: The group focused on making the children feel comfortable with each other and the group leader. Introductions including names and favorite activities were followed by a discussion of family situations and reasons for the group. The pretest was given (Appendix C: 22).

Week 2: Feelings: Introductions were followed by a brainstorming session to see how many feelings the group could name. A game was played where each child picked a card with a feeling on it and shared an example of a time they felt that way. Children chose a feeling to draw or write about.

Week 3: Affirmations: Introductions were followed by an explanation of affirmations. Each child took turns stating something positive about themselves and another group member. A matching game was played with cards with affirmations written on them. Each child wrote a story or drew a picture about what made them special.

Week 4: Anger: Introductions were followed by a discussion about what children or adults do when angry. Children discussed how it is OK to be angry and brainstormed non violent ways to release anger. Puppets demonstrated alternatives to expressing anger.

Week 5: Responsibility: Introduction was followed by a definition of responsibility. Children gave examples of their responsibilities at home, school and in their community. Accepting responsibility actions and behaviors was discussed. Children took turns answering "What if?..." questions related to responsibility.

Week 6: Stereotypes: Introductions followed by a definition and examples of stereotypes. Children discussed

male / female roles. The group made a collage of pictures and statements about stereotypes.

Week 7: Problem solving techniques: Introductions followed by discussion of the process used to solve problem in non-violent ways. Each child was given a problem to discuss possible solutions with the group.

Week 8: Coping Mechanisms. Introductions were followed by a discussion about stress. Negative and positive reactions were examined. Relaxation techniques were practiced.

Week 9: Summary: A brief review of all topics was held to help those who had missed groups and reinforce topics for all group members. Children planned a puppet show reflecting the group topics.

Week 10: Children put on their puppet show for their parents and the other children. The posttest was given followed by a party.

Chapter 5

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The outreach group consisted of ten children from three families. The children had all witnessed domestic violence in their homes and were currently living with their mothers, away from the abusive parent. Although the mothers had committed to bringing the children to all ten sessions, each child attended an average of only five group sessions. On the Parent Evaluation form, all the mothers stated that they felt the group provided the children with topics and skills that would be helpful in preventing their children from becoming involved in abusive relationships (Appendix D: 21).

The results of the group, as related to the stated objectives are as follows:

1. After ten weeks, the children improved their inappropriate behavior by 30 percent as rated by their parent on a pretest and posttest.
2. After ten weeks, each child was able to state a non-violent solution to a problem situation on a self-evaluation form.
3. After ten weeks, each child was able to state three positive affirmations about themselves on a self-evaluation form.

4. After ten weeks, all children were able to identify three feelings and 70 percent of the children could give examples of those feelings on a self-evaluation form.
5. After ten weeks, 60 percent of the children could give an example of a stereotype and 40 percent could rephrase it into a true statement on a self-evaluation form.

Conclusions

The results of this practicum showed an improvement in the children's behaviors as well as an increase in communication skills and the ability to solve problems in non violent ways. Although most of the children attended only half of the group sessions, mothers stated they saw improvements not only in behavior, but in their children's self esteem and ability to solve problems. These results reinforce the need for more groups for children who have witnessed domestic violence.

Another important consideration of the success of the children's group was that the mothers were also attending a therapy group. Mothers were able to deal with their own issues and become more aware of the dynamics of spouse abuse and how it affects their children. The mothers were responsive to a weekly newsletter that discussed the topic of the group that week and how they could implement these skills

at home (Appendix E:). Several mothers stated they felt the group should be longer or ongoing to meet more of their children's needs. Referrals for individual counseling was given to these mothers.

For this group to be effective, the weekly topics must be related to real life situations and activities aimed at the developmental levels of the children in that group. Due to the age range of five through thirteen in this group, children were divided into two groups, utilizing volunteers to do activities with those not in group. Although the topics followed the schedule, children were often given choices (draw a picture or write a story) and encouraged to initiate their own ideas about the topic. This reinforces the children's self esteem and decision making skills throughout the ten week session. The final activity, a puppet show, demonstrated that the children could apply these topics to real life situations.

To break the Intergenerational Cycle of abuse, we must focus our attention on the children who witness parental abuse as we continue to work with their mothers. As Aiken (1981) stated "to intervene is to prevent." Groups such as the one described in this practicum, can build a foundation and start a learning process that will help parents and children live healthier lives. Through parental awarenesss and children's support groups, children can acquire the skills necessary to avoid abusive relationships.

Recommendations

The plans, ideas and results of this practicum have been shared with the Shelter's Director and Outreach Counselor. Both agree with the writer that such a group is needed to intervene and prevent these children from becoming involved in abusive relationships. The shelter plans to continue to use this format in their outreach program.

A summary of the group and a weekly schedule will be available to other shelters who inquire about our Children's program or groups. The summary will also be submitted to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. The information can then be published in their newsletter or available to any shelter in the country requesting information.

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Appendix A

Shelter Support Group Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

(14 mothers - 30 children)

Child's name:_____ Age:__ Sex:__ # of siblings:__

Check any of the phrases below that describe your child.

_10_1. destructive to property (toys, books...)

_8_2. believes in stereotyped male/female roles

_21_3. expresses anger in violent ways (tantrums, hitting, throwing...)

_18_4. blames others for his/her actions (makes excuses...)

_24_5. jealous of peers or siblings

_17_6. lies to get own way

_12_7. does not see anything wrong with violent behavior (hitting, pushing, throwing things...)

_5_8. withdraws from close, healthy relationships with friends

_13_9. unable to ask for help or discuss situation when upset

_12_10. unable to identify and express a variety of feelings

_6_11. feels responsible for parental conflicts

_7_12. has negative image of self (looks, dress, decisions...)

_11_13. has threatened to run away

_0_14. has threatened suicide

_10_15. does not have appropriate coping mechanisms for stress (overly frustrated or disappointed with tests or projects or cancellation of planned activity)

Has your child been in shelter? 25 counseling? 14

Has your child witnessed physical abuse of parent? 25 other types of abuse: emotional 28 sexual 0 isolation 4 financial 19

As a child, did you witness physical abuse between parents? 7 emotional 8 sexual 1 isolation 1 financial 3

Were you abused as a child? physically 5 sexually 4 emotionally 9

Has your child been abused? physically 12 sexually 1 emotionally 21

Appendix B

Behavior Checklist
(Parent Pretest and Posttest)

BEHAVIOR CHECKLIST

(Parent Pretest and Posttest)

N= never Se= seldom S= sometimes O= often A= always

	N	Se	S	O	A
1. Is your child destructive to property? (toys, belongings...)					
2. Does your child believe in stereotyped male/female roles? (men should work, women should clean the house...)					
3. Does your child express anger in violent ways? (hitting, tantrums, throwing things)					
4. Does your child blame others for his/her actions? (excuses...)					
5. Does your child see anything wrong with violent behavior?					
6. Does your child feel good about him/herself? (looks, decisions...)					
7. Is your child able to talk about a variety of feelings?					
8. Does your child know healthy ways to cope with stress?					

Appendix C

Self-evaluation Form

SELF-EVALUATION FORM

(Children's Pretest and Posttest)

1. Name three feelings and give an example of each.

   1-_____

   _____

   2-_____

   _____

   3-_____

   _____

2. Write three positive statements about yourself.

   1- I_____

   2- I_____

   3- I_____

3. Give an example of a stereotype.

   _____

   Now change it into a true statement.

   _____

4. What would you do in the following situations?

   1- Someone is teasing you at school?_____

   _____

   2- Your brother or sister tries to change the channel while you are watching a TV show? _____

   _____

   3- Your brother or sister spills something on your homework due tomorrow? _____

   _____

Appendix D

Parent Evaluation Form

PARENT'S EVALUATION

1. Below are the topics that were discussed in the Children's Group. Please check the ones that you feel were useful to your children and add any that you feel should be added to future groups.

_____feelings _____stereotypes

_____Affirmations _____problem solving / decision making

_____anger _____coping mechanisms

_____responsibility

Other:

2. Was the time period convenient for you?

3. Were the parent newsletters helpful?

4. Do you feel the topics skills your child has learned in group will be helpful in preventing him/her from becoming involved in an abusive relationship?

5. Suggestions or comments:

Appendix E

Parent Newsletter - Sample

Parents.

The topic of this week's children's group is "affirmations". The children will participate in activites that involve making positive statements about themselves and others. The goal of this activity is to build self esteem by having children focus on their own positive characteristics while becoming more aware of the positive characteristics in others.

This topic can be reinforced at home by making positive statements to your child that point out specific characteristics and behaviors. Instead of general statements like "that was good" or "you look nice", be specific: "I like the way you styled your hair today" or "that was generous of you to share your snack."

The same principle works for negative behaviors. Instead of telling your child they are bad, let them know what behavior you did not like. "It hurts your sister when you call her names." This way the child knows that the behavior was wrong but there is still room for you to say lots of positive things to your child.

Let me know if you have any questions about the group.

Corinne

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